

father Thomas Carroll: A Leader and a Legend

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On the fourth floor of the American Printing House for the Blind, the field of blindness services has carved out the site of a Hall of Fame - a hall dedicated to preserving, honoring, and promoting the tradition of excellence, currently embodied by 32 individuals who created and improved systems that have changed the lives of thousands of blind and visually impaired individuals. This hall of fame will grow as additional individuals are inducted.

The field of education and rehabilitation of the blind has long been a field of dreams... a field of accomplishments... a field of impressively dedicated professionals, of insightful and effective leaders. Our profession needed and deserved a venue that honors and pays tribute to those remarkable individuals who have dedicated their careers and their lives to the education and rehabilitation of individuals who are blind or visually impaired. These outstanding professionals and their accomplishments merit recognition by our generation as well as documentation for future generations.

In July 2000, at the AER Conference in Denver, Dean and Naomi Tuttle along with several colleagues prepared and presented a remarkable review of 32 heroes and pioneers of the blindness field. These individuals were a fascinating cross-section of heroes and pioneers who not only shaped the rich history, philosophy, knowledge, and skills of education and rehabilitation of the blind; they also gave us insight into current and future challenges. These giants shared their personal lives and showed us strategies to ensure that services for blind persons remain unique and specialized.

Inspired by this list of champions and their influential and compelling work, APH made a commitment to establish a permanent site to honor the 32 "charter" legends and to design a mechanism for adding other deserving professionals. In February of 2001, APH endowment funds supported a committee of several APH staff members and representative professionals from the field when it met for the first time to initiate the work of creating a Hall of Fame FOR OUR ENTIRE FIELD- a Hall of Fame that will document the cherished heritage given us by our leaders. It will provide inspiration for generations of professionals to come.

Father Carroll's place in the Hall of Fame: Leaders and Legends of the Blindness Field is without question. He was both. He was a leader. He is a legend.

In March, when Tom invited me to address you at today's Father Carroll luncheon, I was very honored. One of the first things I did was pay a visit to Carroll Center in Newton, a suburb of Boston. Rachel Rosenbaum, the director of the Carroll Center, was able to provide me with 19 speeches Father Carroll made to BVA conventions from the first one at the Lincoln Hotel in New York City in 1946, through the 19th convention in San Antonio, TX, in 1964.

It's from those speeches that I have gathered information for this presentation.

While his "hallmark" work is most often associated with blinded veterans and BVA, as it should be, his sphere of influence was not limited to you. His contributions and impact are known widely throughout the field of blindness. They are recognized and respected not only in rehabilitation of the blind, but also in education of blind students, in Orientation and Mobility, in counseling and personal adjustment, in employment programs, and in the training of professionals for service in these areas. Father Carroll's work and his words are legendary and his leadership is felt to this day and will be for generations into the future.

"Father Tom" was a man of letters and a man of conviction. He was a priest for all faiths. He was a friend to be trusted, but never to be hushed.

The passion of Father Carroll's life-journey with blinded veterans and his dedication to you are evident if you look at when he spoke to BVA... They are evidenced in what he spoke to BVA about... and his passion and dedication were the guides for where he took BVA along with the rest of the field of education and rehabilitation of the blind. His passion and dedication were also guides for where he kept us from going.

So, I'd like to focus on when he spoke to you, what he said to you, and where his guidance took us.

Father Thomas Carroll was your National Chaplain for 25 years, and those 25 years were powerful times. They were times of pain and times of promise. As Bob Dylan said, "the times, they were a'changing." He helped you live through the pain of those years, and he helped you live their promise. For a moment, let's take a tour through some of those times when Father Carroll spoke annually to BVA Convention attendees and advised and encouraged and cautioned you, his friends, as he preferred to call you.

- The earliest of his annual addresses was his speech to the first BVA convention in New York in 1946, shortly after the founding of the organization. The wounds of the war were still open and aching, yet he spoke of healing and hope and encouragement when he assured you that "What changes the man is not the blindness, but the reaction to it."
- He spoke to BVA during assaults on it from both without and within and offered guidance and courage regarding BVA's survival in his 1950 speech in Indianapolis which he titled, "Splints and Splinters."
- In Philadelphia in 1953, he spoke to BVA during the time of a "trustless truce" in Indo-china. These were, as he said, "the first days after the Soviet announced its possession of the Hydrogen Bomb."
- He spoke to the 1958 Seattle convention via telephone from New York because he was medically unable to travel the distance. Yet he was not going to let the fact that he couldn't

travel from the East coast to West coast stop him from speaking out about the damage that would be generated if proponents for separate housing for blinded veterans were successful.

- And in Columbus, Ohio, in 1963, he spoke to BVA three weeks before the now-historic March on Washington - and he urged the members of BVA to join that march for justice because "any fight against injustice is an American fight."

The time span of Father Carroll's addresses to BVA members is illustrated by the greetings with which he opened his speeches to you.

- At his early addresses, his greeting was simply, "Members of the Blinded Veterans Association, their wives, their sweethearts, and their friends."
- By 1950, he added "and their children."
- By 1961, he greeted you as, "Members of the Blinded Veterans Association, their wives, their children and their grandchildren, their friends, and their honored guests."

It's important to recognize the times in which Father Carroll spoke to BVA because they were dynamic times for blinded veterans, for our country, and for our world. Father Carroll was a man of those times. He was a man "in time" with the world around him and with the blinded veterans he served. He was a man of thought, and he took time to think, to contemplate, and to consider all the shades of gray within a dilemma. He knew that complicated situations required complicated solutions, and he knew that the answers are not to be found in quick and final actions. Father Carroll led us when we faced times of change, times of challenge, times of important choices.

Father Carroll's passion and dedication and leadership were also evident in what he spoke about and what he said when he addressed you.

In that New York summer of 1946, he began his first remarks by saying, "It is seldom that we have to be reminded of our rights; it is

all too often that we fail to remember our duties." Those two elements - rights and duties, liberties and obligations - were at the core of his work and his world. They embodied what he believed must be at the heart of rehabilitation and, as well, at the heart of private citizenship.

What he said to BVA members tells us volumes about Father Carroll's character as well as his courage and commitment. In his speeches to you, as well as in his day-in and day-out role as chaplain, he spoke of

- Lost sight and lost status - but not lost hope.
- He spoke of blindness and adjustment - and of adjustment to neighbors, to family, and to life.
- He spoke of fear and of overcoming fear.
- He spoke of hope and of his own hopes.
- He spoke of dependence and independence.
- He spoke of dangers to thought and dangers to truth.
- He spoke of special privilege versus opportunity.
- He spoke of sentimentality versus respect.
- He spoke of segregation as surrender.
- He spoke of stereotypes that breed the loss of individuality.
- Father Carroll praised you, and he challenged you.
- He defined your tasks, and he took you to task.
- He spoke to you when he was calm - and he spoke when he was angry.
- He spoke to you of peace, and he spoke to you of action.

Father Carroll never shied away from a topic or a challenge that needed to be addressed, even when it put him in possible conflict with friends and with common thought or common practice. He "called 'em as he saw them." He was gutsy.

He took on tough issues and did it aloud, for all to witness:

- He criticized the VA when it failed in its obligations, and he hailed it when it fulfilled its duty.
- When a splinter group of members broke away to start a separate organization of blinded veterans, he declared at the

1950 convention in Indianapolis, that "There is room for differing opinions in BVA; there is room for two parties in BVA; there is no room in this country for two blinded veterans' organizations." Then he urged unity and the use of the power of the ballot from within the association.

- He believed in the dignity and individuality of all people and fought endlessly to assure that our country's rehabilitation systems respected that dignity and individuality as well. He opposed special privilege for blind individuals which "would set you apart from society in one way or another." He railed against separate housing for blinded veterans, calling them the "ghettos of the blind." He opposed "fragrance gardens." He opposed free fishing licenses and free bus fares saying each is "dangerous because of the harm it can do to public attitudes about blindness and the blind - about you!" He counseled you to "be sure that your every activity leads toward integration rather than segregation."
- Father Carroll spoke bluntly, yet blamelessly, about those who would exploit blindness for fund-raising purposes. He confronted this trend, saying "What must be fought is the selfish use of blindness... Here especially they can separate you from the rest of society by arousing a pity for you... that will do harm to blind persons living or as yet unborn." He cautioned "Your obligation is to see that the emotional appeal has always a reasonable foundation."
- In his speech via telephone to the Seattle convention in 1958, he called for all those involved with rehabilitation and blindness to undergo self-examination concerning the more subtle aspects of exploitation. He then "took on" those who, as he described it, "talked out of both sides of their mouths" through their actions that communicated that blindness was the worst of all handicaps while at other times saying that blindness was "only a minor inconvenience."
- At the 1961 convention in Hollywood, CA, Father Carroll confronted the resistance of some agencies to hire professionally-trained rehabilitation staff. He asked, "How can

we explain the fact that even today (1961) many agencies are employing amateurs to teach mobility or are still scoffing at the idea that there is any need of training?" He declared the field of work for the blind to be at a crossroad and that blinded veterans as well as the blind public at large "need the very best of professional assistance that we can bring to bear."

- In 1964, less that a year after the Kennedy assassination, he warned of a "counter trend" that was beginning to ask, "Why do you need an agency for the blind? Doesn't the state do everything for them?" Then he asked: "What does this [counter trend] mean for you? Does it mean that in any way you should give up the struggle for equal opportunities for blind persons? Does it mean that you sink back and cease to fight, that you retire into special housing for blind people? Of course not! Not for a moment!"

These examples of WHAT Father Carroll said to BVA- as well as the times in which he said them - clearly illustrate, even 33 years after his death, that he was a man of vision and honor who spoke the truth as he saw it, when he saw it. These examples show that he spoke with elegance and with candor and with the good of blinded veterans and of all blind adults always as the foundation of his words. What he said to us back then remains a beacon and an inspiration for us now.

And now a look at WHERE Father Carroll took us:

Father Carroll's leadership and influence steered you as an organization and the field of education and rehabilitation of blind people in its entirety.

He demanded professionalism in education and rehabilitation programs and professional expertise of those who provide services. He required respect and integration for blind individuals. He lead us to places and opportunities we could not have gone alone.

One of his most lasting legacies remains at the heart of blind rehabilitation today. That is, the comprehensive rehabilitation model that

- First of all, looks at each client as an individual
- then gives each individual what he or she needs through professionally- trained staff who help the person put his or her life back together again,
- and then, provides the opportunity to continue a productive and fulfilling life in the direction he or she chooses.

He took us to group action and individual expression, to self-determination and integration, and he always worked toward the motto that those first BVA members chose for themselves: "That the blinded veteran might take his rightful place in the community of his fellows and work with them toward the creation of a peaceful world."

Father Carroll was for us all a conscience, a visionary, a doer.

- He was a man of hope and a man who restored hope.
- He was a man with promise and a man who kept his promises.
- He was a man with spirit - and a man of the spirit.

Truly, Father Carroll earned his place in the Hall of Fame: Leaders and Legends of the Blindness Field. He is honored there, on the 4th floor of the Printing House for you and others to visit and to study. And he is honored throughout our country each day that you claim your individuality, that you "take your rightful places in the community of your fellows" and with every step you take to "create a peaceful world."

It has been an honor to speak to you.
Thank you.